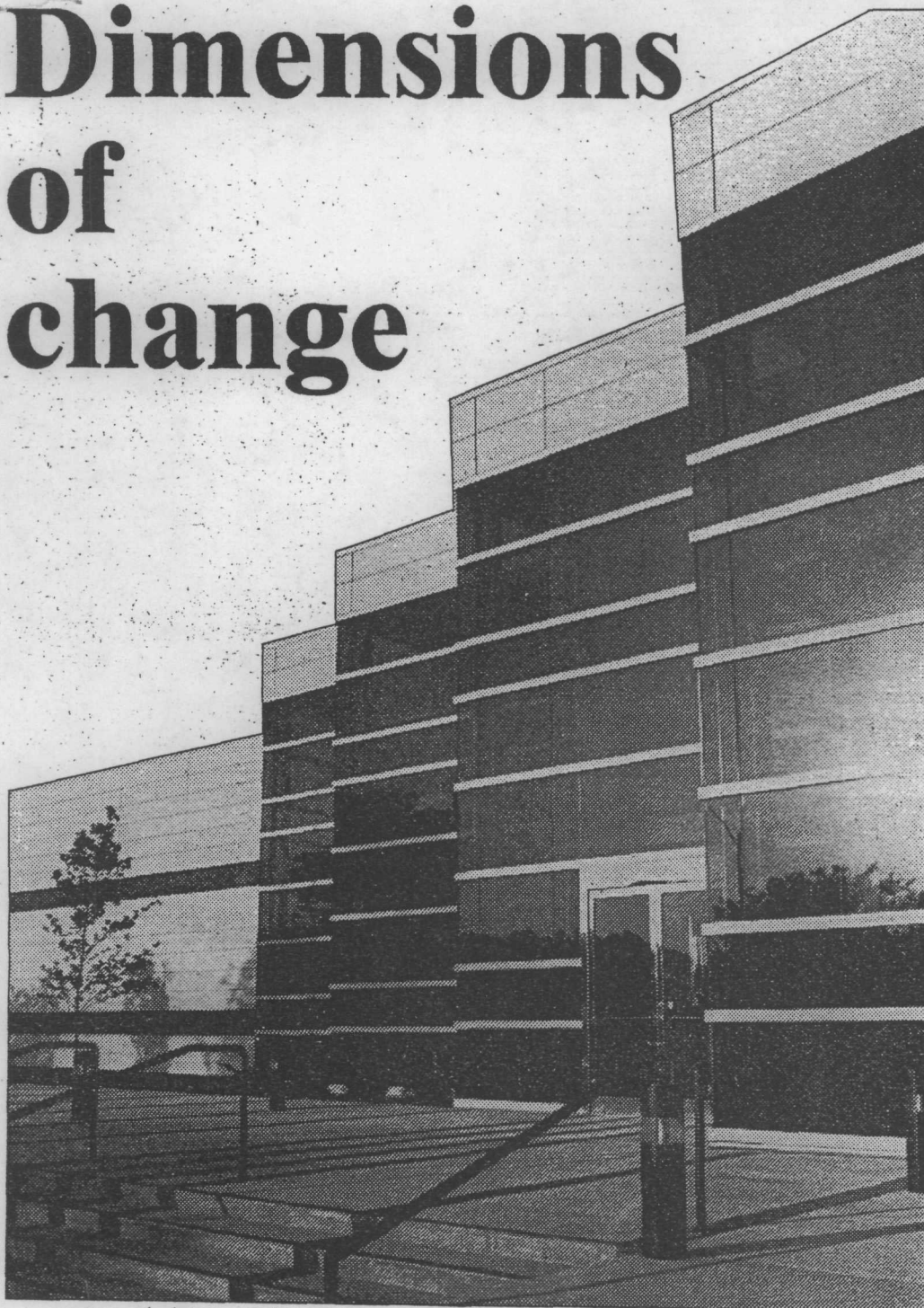


Dimensions of change



BASF's \$8.2 million Plastics Applications Center.

Larry Caruso/Photo Editor

New BASF facility caps a decade of transition

By Marsha Stopa-Harrison
Staff Writer

WYANDOTTE — The formal opening yesterday of BASF Corp.'s Plastics Applications Center is the latest milestone in the 12-year, \$100 million transformation of the city's riverfront.

The company is calling its sleek, cubist, black reflective-glass addition on four acres at the North Works on Biddle Avenue the "newest link in the BASF global technical service network."

The \$8.2 million, ultra-modern, high-tech re-

search facility radically changes the look on Biddle Avenue, lined with more conventional brick architecture dating from much earlier developments.

Listed among the top 100 of Fortune 500 companies worldwide, BASF doesn't plan on ending its expansion in Wyandotte soon.

WITH 375 ACRES in Wyandotte, 300 on Grosse Ile, 30 in Riverview and 1,200 on Fighting Island on the Canadian side of the Detroit River, BASF is a major presence Downriver.

"We're going to continue to grow here," said

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William Axce, retired general manager, who is continuing on a part-time basis working with community relations.

"We make a lot of chemicals that directly or indirectly go into the automobile industry, and as new products develop, Wyandotte would probably be the site of choice."

The firm is linking the opening of the plastics research facility to BASF's 125 anniversary and the 100 anniversary of chemical manufacturing in Wyandotte.

MICHIGAN ALKALI opened its alkali plant on Biddle Avenue in 1890, becoming Wyandotte Chemical in 1950. BASF purchased Wyandotte Chemical in 1969, keeping the name for two years before changing to BASF Wyandotte Corp. in 1971.

BASF operated with most of the old Wyandotte Chemical facilities until 1978, Axce said, closing the transparent iron oxide plant in 1975 and building a Vitamin E production plant in 1978, followed by a Vitamin A plant and steam house in 1983.

From 1978 to 1980, BASF closed down all the old, inorganic plants in the North and South Works that manufactured soda ash, refined sodium bicarbonate, calcium carbonate, chlorine and caustic soda, lime and propylene oxide.

DURING THAT time period, the company's Wyandotte personnel dropped from 2,500 to 500, Axce said, as the old facilities were phased out, the Chemical Specialty Division was sold to Diversy Wyandotte Corp. across the street, and the corporate headquarters was moved from Wyandotte to New Jersey.

For five years, from 1980 to 1985, almost all the old facilities were methodically torn down. The cement plant, now nearly demolished, had been owned by the St. Mary's Peerless Cement Co. and later was reacquired by BASF.

The last five years, especially the last several, have seen major investments on the waterfront, with a \$15.2 million Elastocell plant begun in 1985, an \$8.25 million windshield adhesive plant in 1986, an expansion of the propylene plant and a \$17 million thermoplastics polyurethane facility currently under construction.

THE PLASTICS LAB dedicated this week is the second new laboratory facility built since a urethane applications lab was built in the early 1980s, Axce said.

BASF has received 12-year, 50 percent tax abatements on all its building projects from the city.

Mayor James DeSana remembers his mother's anger in the 1940s when her freshly laundered sheets became soiled from emissions from the fly ash from Wyandotte Chemical's coal-fired power plant when he lived on Eureka Road near Third Avenue.

The chemical company on the river then, and the one there now can't be compared, DeSana said.

"THE SMELL and all that is practically gone," DeSana said. "BASF has been a very responsible corporation. It doesn't cause any mom's today those kind of problems."

DeSana called the city "very fortunate" to have BASF in the city, and added that it's "nice to see a corporation today be that concerned about the environment and be that responsible."

Veteran Councilman Richard Kelly said BASF provides a solid and growing tax base for the city and steady employment in a non-cyclical industry.

He, too, remembers the smoke, the coal piles and the dust that use to pour from Wyandotte Chemical.

"Now it's sleek and sophisticated," Kelly said. "It's not that nitty-gritty look."

"Anything they've done has been quality, a first-class job. I hope to see that continue."

BOTH COMPANY and city officials said they were not worried about disagreements on what should be built on the now vacant 80 acres where the South Works stood.

BASF officials maintain they want the site to stay light industrial, but city officials want to see a mixed-use development with more public access to the river.

The problem, and determining factor, will be the level of contamination on the site from previous disposal practices.

Everyone is awaiting the results of a hydrogeologic study on land that will dictate what can, and can't, be built there.

Axce said he has seen a draft of the results, and "there are no major, new surprises."